

SENATE—Tuesday, May 2, 2000

The Senate met at 9:33 a.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore [Mr. THURMOND].

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Lloyd John Ogilvie, offered the following prayer:

Gracious God, Lord of our lives and Sovereign of this Nation, we thank You for the attitude change that takes place when we remember that we are called to glorify You in our work and to work with excellence to please You. The Senators are responsible to their constituents; their staffs report to them; and others are part of the Senate support team. All of us are employed to serve the Government, but ultimately we are responsible to You for the work we do and how we do it. Help us to realize how privileged we are to be able to work, earn wages, and provide for our needs. Thank You for the dignity of work.

We press on today with enthusiasm, remembering that You have called us to our work and will give us a special measure of strength. Whatever we do, in word or deed, we do it to praise You. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable JUDD GREGG, a Senator from the State of New Hampshire, led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RECOGNITION OF THE ACTING MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VOINOVICH). The Senator from Alaska.

SCHEDULE

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, today the Senate will begin consideration of the veto override of S. 1287, the nuclear waste repository legislation. By previous consent, the time prior to 12:30 p.m. will be equally divided between Senator MURKOWSKI and the Senators from Nevada. Senator REID is on the floor. At 12:30 p.m., the Senate will recess for the weekly party conference meetings until 2:15 p.m. Following the conferences, there will be 1 hour of debate remaining on the nuclear waste veto override, with a vote scheduled to occur at 3:15 p.m. After the vote, the Senate will resume debate on S. 2, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, with votes possible throughout the evening. The leader thanks his colleagues for their attention.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. VOINOVICH). Under the previous order, the leadership time is reserved.

NUCLEAR WASTE POLICY AMENDMENTS ACT OF 2000—VETO

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, the Senate will now proceed to the consideration of the veto message accompanying S. 1287, which the clerk will report.

The legislative clerk read as follows:

Veto message on S. 1287, a bill to provide for the storage of spent nuclear fuel pending completion of the nuclear waste repository, and for other purposes.

(The text of the President's veto message is printed on page S3017 of the CONGRESSIONAL RECORD of April 27, 2000.)

The Senate proceeded to consider the veto message.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Under the previous order, there shall be 90 minutes under the control of the Senator from Alaska, Mr. MURKOWSKI, and 90 minutes under the control of the Senators from Nevada, Mr. REID and Mr. BRYAN.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, it is my understanding Senator BINGAMAN has indicated a desire to speak. I believe he is off the floor at this time and will be coming momentarily. I suggest the absence of a quorum and ask unanimous consent that the time be equally taken off both sides.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered. The clerk will call the roll.

The bill clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, it is my intent to accommodate Senator BINGAMAN's schedule.

I yield to the ranking member of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee, Senator BINGAMAN, with the understanding that the time be charged to the other side.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from New Mexico.

Mr. BINGAMAN. Mr. President, I will take a few minutes to give my perspective on this upcoming vote to override the President's veto.

The question before the Senate is not whether the Senate supports the construction of a nuclear waste repository. Clearly, I support construction of a nuclear waste repository. The President

has indicated he does. The Department of Energy has made significant progress on a repository in the time this administration has been in office. In fact, the Department of Energy has made much more progress in the past 7 years under President Clinton than during the preceding 10 years under Presidents Reagan and Bush.

The President, according to the statement he issued, is "committed to resolving the . . . issue in a timely and sensible manner consistent with sound science and protection of public health, safety, and the environment."

This bill was not vetoed by the President because he does not want to solve the nuclear waste problem. He vetoed it because, as he stated in his veto message, this bill "will do nothing to advance" the program. That is a quote out of the statement that was issued. And secondly, instead of doing something to advance the program, the bill will be "a step backward."

What are the problems that face the nuclear waste program today? Let me go through those problems with a little bit of detail so we all understand what those problems are and we can assess whether or not there is anything in this bill that helps us address that.

First, burying tens of thousands of tons of highly radioactive waste in Yucca Mountain and making sure it does not escape for tens of thousands of years—that is the goal we set for ourselves—raises very difficult scientific and technical questions.

Only last month, the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board, which Congress created to advise us on these matters, warned that "a credible technical basis does not exist for the repository design." This is the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board. This is a group that Congress established. This is not some left-wing environmental organization that made this statement.

That report also went on to say, "large uncertainties" still exist in how the Yucca Mountain site will behave, and "much work remains to be completed." That is an exact quote from that review board.

The bill before us does nothing to advance the scientific program that is trying to resolve these issues. Instead, the bill will make it harder for the Department of Energy to resolve these issues by imposing substantial new requirements which will divert the limited resources they have away from the essential scientific work that needs to be done.

A second problem facing the program is public confidence. People need to know that the repository will be safe